Unit .05

Session .01

A Test in the Wilderness

Scripture

Exodus 16:2-4, 13-20; 17:3-6

2 The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. **3** The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!" **4** Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions." … **13** So at evening quail came and covered the camp. In the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. **14** When the layer of dew evaporated, there were fine flakes on the desert surface, as fine as frost on the ground. **15** When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, "What is it?" because they didn't know what it was. Moses told them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. **16** This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each person needs to eat. You may take two quarts per individual, according to the number of people each of you has in his tent.'" **17** So the Israelites did this. Some gathered a lot, some a little. **18** When they measured it by quarts, the person who gathered a lot had no surplus, and the person who gathered a little had no shortage. Each gathered as much as he needed to eat. **19** Moses said to them, "No one is to let any of it remain until morning." **20** But they didn't listen to Moses; some people left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. Therefore Moses was angry with them. … **3** But the people thirsted there for water and grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you ever bring us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" **4** Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with these people? In a little while they will stone me!" **5** The LORD answered Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you. Take the staff you struck the Nile with in your hand and go. **6** I am going to stand there in front of you on the rock at Horeb; when you hit the rock, water will come out of it and the people will drink." Moses did this in the sight

Intro Options

Main Point:
God's goodness is shown through His sustaining grace toward His people.

Option 1

Display a compass or use a compass app. Point out that the needle doesn't point in the direction you need to go; it points to true north. True north helps you decide which road to take to get where you're going. That's like the Holy Spirit's teaching. He gives you truth in His Word; truth helps you know the way to go.

- **When you find yourself in a difficult situation, not knowing which way to turn or what decision to make, are you more likely to complain first or do you go to God? Explain.**
- **Think of an area in your life where you need the Spirit to guide you. What expectations can you have of God regarding this? What expectations does God have of you in this?**

Direct students to write three things on an index card: Something they need God to teach or help them with, a temptation they often face, and a step they will take to seek God's help in the days ahead.

Point out that people don't often look for God's help until they have a problem; instead, they complain or grumble to other people. Ask God to help you grow every day so that when those problems come, you're ready to face them with the confidence that God will guide you in the direction He wants you to go.

Option 2

Place students in groups of three or four. Ask them to imagine they, like the Israelites, were wandering in the wilderness. Instruct students to look at their personal belongings and items around the room that might help them "survive." Each student in the group must contribute a different item. Allow students a few minutes to come up with a story for how these items would help their group survive wandering in the wilderness.

It's okay if they don't have much to contribute. After they tell their story, ask:

- **What would you ask God to provide for you on your journey?**

This exercise is just to get them thinking about the Israelites journey through the wilderness. They had to trust God to provide for them, even when they didn't understand what He was doing. The same is true for us. Although we may not be walking through a physical wilderness, we still face difficult situations and will need to learn to trust God to provide.

TEACHING PLAN

Do you know the difference between an atheist and a functional atheist? An atheist rejects belief in God, while a functional atheist says he or she believes in God while also living as though God doesn't exist. This is someone who claims Christ without submitting to His lordship, or tries to make decisions apart from God, as if He doesn't exist.

- **Why is functional atheism not genuine Christian faith? Can you tell a difference in your own life?**

This is the story of the Israelites in the Book of Exodus. Just after being delivered from the Egyptians through God's powerful hand, they became thirsty and complained to Moses (Ex. 15:22-27). Their grumbling voices were directed toward Moses, but their faithless hearts were directed toward God (Ex. 16:8). Their functional atheism was on display. Still, God provided water for them—once again through a miracle. However, the people would grumble again soon, this time as their stomachs growled.

Read Exodus 16:2-41.

- **What is your first reaction to the Israelites' complaining? Why?**

This grumbling and wandering will become the consistent refrain of God's people throughout the Exodus account. Moments of faith give way to periods of doubt. They were quick to forget God's work and His love for them, as well as their chains in Egypt. Instead, the people would focus on the challenge before them and shake in fear.

Pharaoh made their work more difficult by not providing straw, so they complained to Moses and doubted God. Still, God delivered them. The Egyptian army chased after them, so they complained to Moses and doubted God. But God fought for them and won the victory. They became thirsty in the wilderness, so they complained to Moses and doubted God. Yet, God provided water for them. They grew hungry, so they complained to Moses and doubted God. Once more, God displayed His grace and faithfulness to His fearful and distrusting people.

- **When was the last time you complained about a situation you were in? How does complaining reveal a sense of entitlement on our part?**

Activity

When you have finished the lesson, ask students to write out something they dislike or complain about. Now, instruct them to come up with a drawing or a skit showing how someone should deal with what they dislike rather than complaining. (If you do skits, they'll need to work together.) Point out that Jesus took upon Himself the wrath that we should have received for our complaining and distrust in God. Examples of what students might show could be a person thinking Romans 8:28 in the midst of a difficult situation, or a person who complains about his parents' nosiness by giving thanks to God that his parents are still alive. Help students as necessary.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Exodus 16

16:2-3. After God had proven Himself many times over through the plagues, plundering the Egyptians, and deliverance from the Egyptian army, God invited the Israelites to continue to trust Him. But instead of resting in faith, they grumbled in fear. Fear was the root issue for the Israelites. They had no food, saw no way to find food, and became overwhelmed with fear that they would starve to death in the wilderness. Their fear caused them to complain and distrust God, even going so far as to irrationally wish they had died in Egypt as slaves rather than in the wilderness.

While the Israelites refrain was to doubt God, question Him, and walk in disobedience, God's refrain is to extend His inexhaustible grace, mercy, and forgiveness. God's patience runs deep. Right after God's people complained and questioned His character, said they would rather be slaves than starve, and accused God of taking them this far only to let them die, God responded not in wrath but in love. Instead of responding to the Israelites as we probably would have and raining fire from heaven, God rained bread from heaven to feed His grumbling people.

Nothing has really changed in a few thousand years. God is just as faithful even as we are just as faithless. We wander and run from God. We doubt Him. We complain. We put our hope in other things instead of turning to God, trusting Him, worshiping Him, and hoping in Him. Still, God continues to love us and extend unending amounts of grace and mercy upon us.

99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 64, DDG)*

God Is Gracious

God's nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

TEACHING PLAN

In their hunger and fear, the people doubted and grumbled, yet God was gracious and promised to provide manna—bread from heaven—for them. But God's provision came with a caveat: the people were to gather only what they needed for each day. When they gathered on the sixth day, they would find they had twice as much as the other days so they would not need to gather on the Sabbath. This would be God's way of testing His people (Ex. 16:4-5).

Read Exodus 16:13-20.

- **Why do you think God didn't want the people getting more than a day's worth of manna?**

To understand the nature of God's wilderness test, we need to understand that the manna He provided was satisfying. When God told the people to gather a portion each day, whatever they gathered was the exact amount they needed. If someone tried to gather more manna, whatever was left over at the end of the day would rot before the next day. Why? Because God wanted them to go to sleep each night trusting not in the manna they had stockpiled by their effort, but rather in the manna God would provide. The Israelites had to have faith in God to provide for them, a faith they lacked to this point.

Of course, it's tough for us to realize this point—many of us live in a day and culture when our cupboards are rarely empty. God provided manna each morning to satisfy them for that day. But the question remained—would they cast off fear and live in faith that He would do the same the next day and the next? In this test, God addressed the Israelites' functional atheism. He was teaching them not to rely on their own efforts and instead to rest in His perfect provision.

- **In what ways has the Lord provided for you, even in difficult times?**
- **God intended to train and form His people during their years in the wilderness. How might God be forming you through difficult times?**

Read Exodus 17:3-6.

The story reads like a broken record. The people of Israel failed to trust God. They gave in to fear and complained. In His patience, God responded with mercy instead of wrath. This time though, He did it a little differently. With no water around, God told Moses to strike a rock with his staff—the same staff that parted the waters of the Red Sea. When Moses struck the rock, God would provide water for His people from it.

- **What does complaining about our circumstances say about our heart's posture toward God?**

God was providing more than just water to satisfy His people's thirst. This miracle pointed to the greater provision of salvation in Christ. We cannot miss that the people were faithless once again. Yet, God chose to strike the rock and not His children, foreshadowing the day when He would send the Son to be struck once and for all for our salvation.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's goodness is shown through His sustaining grace toward His people.

Exodus 16–17

16:20-27. God provided quail and manna for His people when they were hungry. But His provision was also a test. The people were to gather only what they needed each day, except on the sixth day when they gathered enough for the Sabbath as well. God was testing His people to see if they trusted Him—a lesson they desperately needed to learn. However, God's people weren't able to pass the test. They didn't listen to Moses' instructions and attempted to store manna overnight, only to discover it bred worms and stank (Ex. 16:20). They also attempted to gather manna on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:27). After all they had seen God do for them, they still struggled to trust Him.

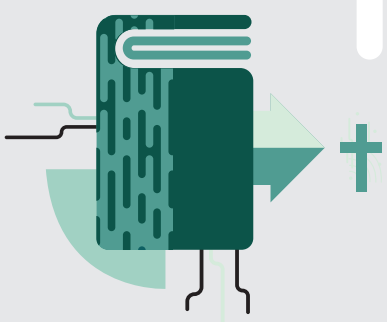
1 Corinthians 10:3-4. There are a number of connections to Christ as you study the wilderness experience. Regarding baptism, Paul compared Israel's escape through the waters through their identity with Moses to being baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 10:1-2; Gal. 3:27). He then stated that God nourished the people just as He nourishes us spiritually (1 Cor. 10:3-4).

In this "rock experience," Paul said this story pointed to Christ who is the rock that was stricken for our salvation. When Paul said, "that rock was Christ" (v. 4), I take this to mean that the rock was a type of Christ. Moses struck the rock instead of striking the people and water flowed to save people. Jesus, the rock, was stricken for our salvation. Instead of striking us, God struck the Son. Like the rock, when He was stricken water flowed from His side (John 19:34). He died the death we deserved to die. Now, we drink from the water of life for eternal life (John 7:37-38). By believing in Jesus, we drink from the ultimate saving water.

The stories in Exodus instruct and encourage us, but they also serve as a warning to us. Paul used these stories as a warning to the Corinthian church. Despite seeing the signs and hearing God's Word, the Israelite generation that experienced God's miraculous deliverance from Egypt and His provision in the wilderness didn't get to see the promised land (Num. 14:22-23,29,37; 26:64-65; 1 Cor. 10:5). Despite these wonderful provisions, only a few had real faith in God (Heb. 3:16-19; 4:2).

(p. 66, DDG) Christ Connection

Moses struck the rock instead of the people, and water flowed for the people's salvation. Jesus is the Rock who was struck for our salvation, the Rock whose living water satisfies us forever.



A TEST IN THE WILDERNESS

Exodus 16:2–4, 13–20; 17:3–6

A TEST IN THE WILDERNESS

God's goodness is shown through His sustaining grace toward His people.

JESUS CONNECTION

Moses struck the rock, and water flowed out for the people's salvation in the wilderness. Jesus is the Rock who was struck for our salvation, the Rock whose living water satisfies us forever.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

CONTENTMENT – Being satisfied with what God has given and not desiring anything more.

HEAD

What did the Israelites complain about?

How did God respond to their complaining?

HEART

The manna God provided was not just satisfying for their physical appetites; it also fed their faith. Has God ever provided everything you needed (nothing more, nothing less) at the perfect time? Explain. How did that experience build your trust in God that He will give you everything you need?

When was the last time you complained about a situation you were in? How does complaining reveal a sense of entitlement on our part?

HANDS

Being grateful for what God has given you is one way to exercise contentment. Find a notebook or staple some blank paper together to create a gratitude journal. Every day, write down at least 2 new things you are grateful for that God has provided for you. Thank Him for those blessings.